



Grantees interested in participating in training workshops and follow-up onsite help may contact Audrey Smolkin (asmolkin@hrsa.gov) for referrals and further information.

February 19, 2002

PEER-TO-PEER MENTORING PROGRAM

On February 19, 2002, the Community Access Program's new Peer-to-Peer Mentoring program was launched during a technical assistance call that brought together CAP grantees and presenters from the Georgia Health Policy Center.

Dennis Wagner of HRSA began the call with his thoughts on peer mentoring. Mr. Wagner conveyed two assertions and two requests for the CAP community:

Assertions

1. The individuals who have the knowledge and expertise to increase access to health care and improve health status already exist within the CAP community. Many national experts are already CAP grantees.
2. Peer mentors do not just bring knowledge and expertise to the collaboratives they are assisting, they bring the sure certainty that "it can be done", because they've already done it or are doing it. That power is a mentor's most valuable asset. It removes the "what ifs" for a collaborative that is just beginning the process.

Requests

1. Mentors should go beyond the role of subject matter expert or professional. A mentor's spirit should enjoin the community and take part in the results. Also, a mentor should enter the relationship with the intention to stay in it for the long haul.
2. Peer mentors should get comfortable with the models and language used in the CAP program. They should work closely with CAP team members, especially Audrey Smolkin, to step into the role of national leaders in both formal and informal ways.

What is Peer Mentoring?

Karen Minyard of the Georgia Health Policy Center joined the call to discuss the concept of peer mentoring in general. She presented a historical definition of mentors as those who “gently guide and nurture the growth of others in various stages of development.” The following list details characteristics of an effective mentor:

- Humility
- Self-Acceptance
- Kindness
- Attentiveness
- Integrity
- Non-Judgment
- Trustfulness
- Perseverance
- Patience
- Simplicity
- Guidance
- Nurturing

Ms. Minyard emphasized the importance of listening. Listening attentively to others, regardless of their status or position, is an important trait of a good mentor. Learning and teaching should be exchanged gladly with mutual appreciation. Guidance should involve little intervention, no manipulation, and no coercion or imposed views. Peer mentors should suggest choices while allowing mentees to build personal initiatives. This allows mentees to benefit from the experience of creating or achieving something on their own.

In an ideal world, peer-to-peer mentoring would always lead to a long-term relationship. However, this may or may not occur. Both the mentor and the mentee should enter the relationship with realistic expectations. It would be most helpful for a peer mentor to offer assistance in the context of the bigger picture, in the event that the relationship does not continue.

Effective Peer Mentoring

Tina Anderson Smith from the Georgia Health Policy Center joined the call next to discuss peer mentoring in greater detail. To prepare for this particular call, Ms. Smith spoke with several individuals about the reasons they chose to participate in peer mentoring. Most people said they wanted to help other communities grow faster, and help them avoid having to reinvent the wheel. All of the participants she spoke to said they developed new energy from helping others.

Ms. Smith emphasized the fact that everyone has skills to offer. Several people told her they wanted to help others, but weren't sure what help they could provide. She encouraged call participants to think carefully about those personal and organizational skills they take for granted that might be useful to other grantees.

Two types of assistance are typically offered in a peer-mentoring situation:

- **Organizational Development.** Often referred to as “the basics”, this type of assistance can include answering questions such as how one gets the right people to the table, and how to engage effective partners.
- **Program Development.** Referred to as “the mechanics”, this type of assistance involves answering more specific how-to or technical questions, such as how to improve access to pharmaceuticals.

Tips for Being an Effective Peer Mentor

Ms. Smith provided the following advice for potential mentors:

- Do not impose your own personal approach on another community. Instead, help broaden their approach by offering your expertise according to their plan.
- Help mentees find their own wisdom by asking forward-thinking questions.
- Provide guidance and support through nurturing as opposed to leadership.
- Ensure that the information you provide to your mentee is truly valuable and useful to them.
- Try to tailor the work you're doing to your mentee's specific circumstance.
- Be open to learning from those you're trying to help.
- Be an excellent LISTENER.
- Be creative and honest and treat others with respect.
- Be practical and logical.
- Make your role as a mentor a priority, and be responsive to the needs of the community you're trying to help.
- Try to create an effective message.
- Don't have a personal or institutional agenda. Be helpful without being prescriptive.
- Understand the impact of what you say. Keep in mind that your audience may take what you say very literally.
- Try to remain neutral and stay out of political environments. Try not to offend.
- Be REAL. Don't get hung up on being an expert and forget to be human.
- Share your pitfalls as well as your accomplishments. Let others learn from your mistakes.
- Be concrete about your outcomes, whether with statistics, graphs, or stories.
- Talk about your relationships.
- Compliment your partners on what they've done well so far. You may see successes they cannot see for themselves.

Recommended Process for Peer Mentors

Ms. Smith recommended the following process for peer mentors approaching a new relationship:

1. Request detailed information about the peer program.
2. Provide a general overview of your own initiative.
3. Help your mentee get very specific about their needs and requests for assistance.
4. Make offers about specific ways you can help and include any time limitations.
5. Determine the most appropriate and cost-effective vehicle for transferring information, whether it be via phone, email, or site visits.
6. Prepare and organize all relevant information.
7. ALWAYS follow-through with the commitments you make.
8. Check to see if your mentee's needs were effectively met and determine whether there are any outstanding needs.
9. Complete an evaluation of the peer learning activity to identify opportunities for improvements in the future.

A Peer Mentor's Experience

Alan McKenzie, CEO of Buncombe County CARES, joined the call to discuss his personal experience as a peer mentor. The Buncombe County collaborative, located in Asheville, North Carolina, has been very successful in establishing a coordinated system of care for virtually all uninsured residents. Partners have experienced a remarkable return on investment since implementing their system, enabling them to care for more patients with fewer resources. This success story has led to numerous requests for assistance from other collaboratives.

McKenzie spoke openly about how his mentoring experience developed over time. His first experience was characterized by an attempt to "force" Buncombe's model onto a mentee's unique situation. Acknowledging an unsuccessful first attempt at mentoring, McKenzie was determined to learn from his experience as he responded to subsequent requests for assistance based on his program's success. He learned the importance of continual dialogue – asking effective questions, listening carefully to mentee responses, and encouraging mentees to extract applicable lessons from the Buncombe model to apply to their communities' unique environments. He modified his presentation of the Buncombe model to consolidate key program parameters and tell Buncombe's story from multiple perspectives, both qualitative and quantitative, that anticipated the information needs of different collaboratives. Through effective dialog with these mentees, McKenzie found he was able, not only to add to his program's knowledge base, but to create supporting documentation so effective that at least one collaborative has used it to successfully tailor the Buncombe model to their community needs with little direct interaction with McKenzie.

McKenzie emphasized that learning from mistakes made in early mentoring efforts inevitably strengthens mentoring muscle for subsequent efforts. He noted that the personal experience of being a peer mentor is its own reward and well worth the time it takes to help a peer community. The knowledge that your program's success can be used to help others and, in the process, enhance your own understanding through effective dialogue only enhances the personal benefits of peer mentoring.

Mr. McKenzie made the following additional points during the call:

- While certain models may be adopted by communities, they will always be adapted to local circumstances to varying degrees. Every community is unique, and every model may not fit every community.
- A mentor's goal should be to accelerate learning among members of the mentee community, and to do so as efficiently and effectively as possible.
- Sometimes just telling a mentee your program's story, backing off, and letting them run with it is the best approach.
- Giving mentees more information than they ask for may cause information overload and do more harm than good. However, sometimes you have to encourage communities to challenge preconceptions and perceptions of potential partners.
- Understand and acknowledge that what was best for your community may not be best for your mentee's current objectives.

A Peer Mentee's Experience

Ted Hanley, Executive Director of the Jesse Tree in Galveston, Texas, joined the call to speak to grantees about his experience as a mentee. Mr. Hanley discussed how peer mentors worked with Jesse Tree partners, encouraging them to think globally, to standardize program information, and to consider various combinations of relevant models they could tailor to their unique program needs. Mr. Hanley noted that their mentors worked to understand their requirements, providing suggestions and affirmation based on their own experiences, yet maintained a neutral posture than encouraged them to set their own program planning parameters.

Tips for Being an Effective Mentee

Tina Anderson Smith offered the following comments to potential mentees:

- Be sure to request the right information at the right time. Carefully consider the appropriate time to ask for help in light of your program's ability in terms of time and resources required to take advantage of the assistance you request.
- Be as specific as possible about your program's needs.
- Be respectful of your mentor's time and realistic about the amount and type of assistance you can expect.

- Resist becoming overly dependent on your mentor, and take the initiative to continue working on your own. Over-reliance on your mentor's input may put a strain on your relationship as well as the time available to provide assistance.

Recommended Process for Mentees

Ms. Smith provided the following recommended process for mentees approaching a new peer mentoring relationship:

1. Prepare a written summary of your initiative for your mentor. Make sure it includes goals, scope, resources, challenges, etc.
2. Clarify your request by determining what you want to accomplish, what strengths and weaknesses you have, and what you think is the next step for your program.
3. Work with others to find the right mentor match. Take advantage of CAP's Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program, which provides matching services.
4. Clarify the amount and type of assistance being offered and what your mentor is willing and able to share with you. Keep in mind that some resources are copyrighted, which may constrain your mentor's ability to share them fully with your program.
5. Clarify your community's role in your peer mentor relationship.
6. Follow through on your obligations and be available to receive assistance when it's offered to you.
7. Provide feedback to your mentor so they know they're being helpful. Keep them updated on the outcomes that result from their assistance. Remember to say "thank you"!
8. Evaluate the experience for future reference and share your success with the CAP Community.

How CAP's Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program Will Work

CAP representatives will use information from grantees' six-month reports and the Grantee Compendium to attempt to match prospective peer mentoring partners. However, giving or receiving mentoring services will be expedited considerably for those grantees who take the time to complete CAP's Mentoring Program forms. To receive forms, please contact Audrey Smolkin at asmolkin@hrsa.gov, or visit the CAP web site at <http://www.capcommunity.hrsa.gov>. The information generated to support this initiative will be housed in a database that may be made available on the web site in the near future.

Funds for providing grantee mentoring assistance will be taken from respective grantee technical assistance funds. Collaboratives interested in participating in the program as mentees who lack the required technical assistance funds are encouraged to contact Ms. Smolkin to identify alternative funding sources. There is no cost to prospective mentors who offer assistance.

Grantees requesting assistance should be *very specific* when describing the help they need. Simply saying “I need help with MIS” is not clear enough. Mentors are also asked to be specific about the assistance they are willing to offer and to provide resumes for each person on their team that will be available to offer assistance. Be sure to mention any limitations on time or other resources. For example, although site visits can be mutually beneficial to mentors and mentees, they are not required or always necessary. Grantees who wish to limit their participation to phone calls, emails, or even a single TA call, should note such constraints when completing their form.

Conclusion

Clearly, the Peer Mentoring experience can benefit both mentors and mentees. All grantees are encouraged to review their programs for strengths and weaknesses to determine if they have something to offer or gain from their CAP colleagues.

Further information about the CAP Peer-to-Peer Mentoring Program, including program forms and the briefing documents distributed prior to this call, is available from Audrey Smolkin at asmolkin@hrsa.gov.